Delay in announcing MSP for paddy

357. SHRI RAMA SHANKER KAUSHIK: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the reason of delay in the announcement of Minimum Support Price of paddy inspite of taking a decision;

(b) whether it is a fact that Government agencies are not buying the paddy arriving in the market inspite of their willingness; and

(c) whether Government would prefer to buy paddy through middlemen; if not, by.when Government would declare the Minimum Support Price in order to get rid the farmers of this problem and save them from the clutches of middlemen?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) The Government has already announced the Minimum Support Price as Rs. 530 per quintal for common variety and Rs. 560 for Gr. 'A' variety of Paddy for the 2002-03 Kharif Season.

(b) and (c) A total quantity of 8.21 million tonnes of rice (including paddy converted into rice) has been procured so far during the current Kharif Marketing Season as against 7.93 million tonnes of rice (including paddy converted into rice) during the corresponding period last year.

Ambitious plan for drought

358, SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the country has first time witnessed the worst drought during the last twelve years;

(b) if so, the names of the States most affected by the drought;

(c) the amount of financial assistance provided by the Central Government to the drought affected States;